

# GESTURE

In the last chapter, we explored drawing solely through observation. Maybe you're thinking, "How can I do anything else but draw what I see?" but if you want to be able to draw people on the street who don't stay still long enough for you to record their exact contours, you'll need another tool in your toolbox.

Gesture is the first step in creating drawings from your imagination. Or maybe I should say re-creating because you are attempting to translate what you saw in a moment into a drawing that may take several minutes to develop.

In public settings, subjects rarely stay still for very long. They are constantly gesturing or shifting their weight. If they are doing something very active like playing basketball or even just walking, they will only maintain a pose for a fraction of a second.

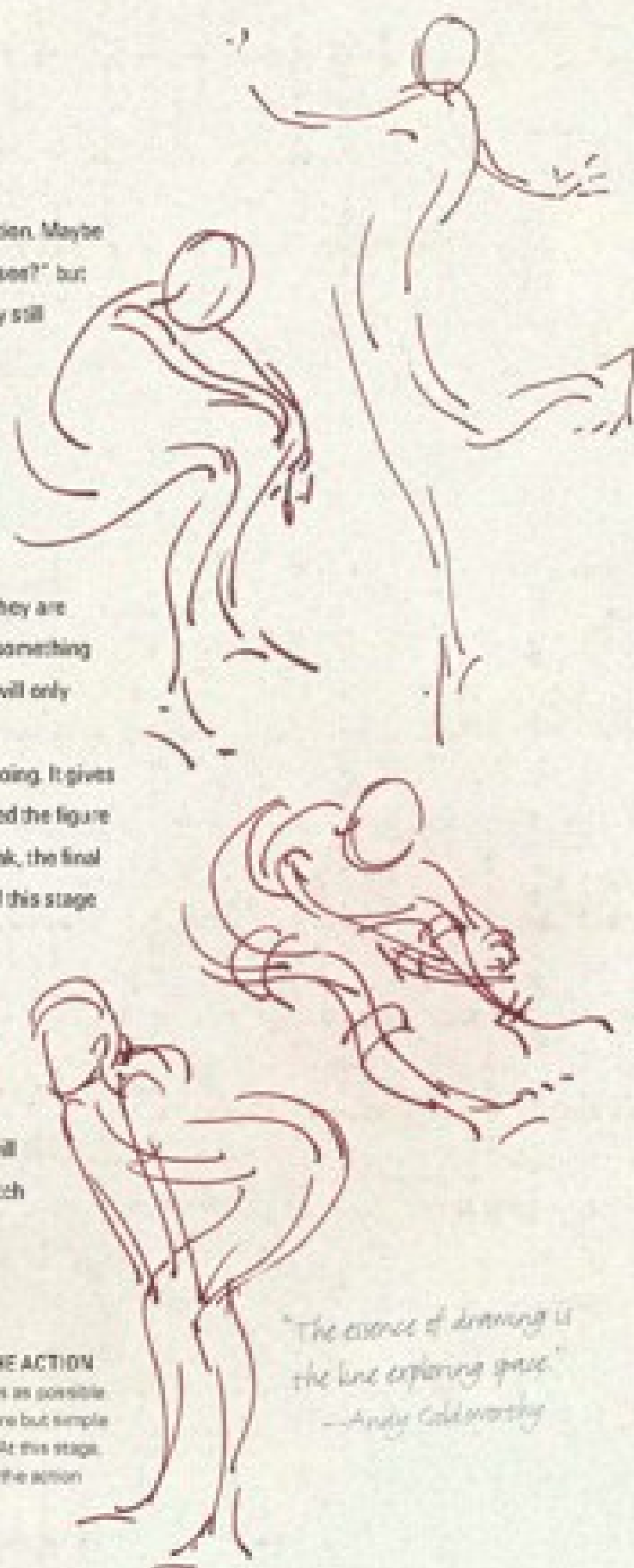
Gesture allows you to quickly convey what your subject is doing. It gives a solid foundation so that when the drawing is further developed the figure maintains a fluid, orchestrated rhythm. If this foundation is weak, the final drawing will be, too. I cannot overemphasize the importance of this stage of the drawing.

Mastering this stage will develop your drawing skill more than any other chapter in this book. If you establish a clear gesture, your overall drawing will begin to take on a dynamic fluidity that is as individual as your handwriting.

The observational skills you developed in the last chapter will come in handy when you see an action you want to capture. Watch your subject so you can capture his or her pose.

## USE GESTURE DRAWINGS TO CAPTURE THE ACTION

These gestures capture poses with as few lines as possible. The lines don't copy actual contours of the figure but simple rhythms and placement of the limbs and torso. At this stage, you should be more concerned with capturing the action as quickly as possible than drawing a figure.



*"The essence of drawing is the line exploring space."*  
—Andy Goldsworthy

# STEPS TO GESTURE DRAWING

Developing a consistent step-by-step approach will help you avoid any hesitation when beginning a drawing. Once you have internalized this artistic process it will free your mind to concentrate on what you're trying to communicate rather than how to draw. That is not to say you can't change the procedure to suit your needs, but as a rule, you will be better off approaching each drawing with a process you are comfortable with.



## 1| Begin With an Oval for the Head

Keep in mind how the head tilts in space. The head is a good plane to start because it establishes a rough proportion for the figure.



## 2| Draw the Neck as It Pulls From the Head

This line will roughly follow the movement of the spine. You won't necessarily draw the anatomical position of the spine, just its movement in relation to the head.



## 3| Continue Down the Body

Capture the fluid movement of the torso. Notice that the lines are basically single strokes. They're not "hairy" lines; they are short little hatch marks.

### JUST GO AROUND ONCE

You don't need to go around and around and around to draw an oval. Draw efficiently, keeping the drawing simple and light. This skill is so fundamental that I will fill up pages practicing circles and other basic forms.



### FINISHED GESTURE DRAWING

This first stage of drawing looks simple when done correctly. It will establish the foundation for everything else. If the drawing is weak at this stage, it will be far more difficult to develop it.



### PRACTICE OBSERVATIONAL SKILLS

When you see someone doing something interesting, close your eyes and remember the body position. Where was the left arm? Was he or she leaning forward or away? Which direction was the head tilted? What was he or she wearing? What was the overall demeanor? Now open your eyes. If the person is in the same position, check the accuracy of your memory.

# DRAWING SPEED

Even though you are capturing something in motion, you don't have to rush. Be bold and lay down lines with confidence, but don't hurry. If your subject moves before you finish the gesture, you can rely on your memory, invent the rest of the pose or wait (people tend to fall back into the same position over time either because of a repeated action or an ingrained mannerism).

Keep in mind that although gesture drawings can be an end unto themselves, their purpose is to provide a framework to build on—so draw lightly. If you draw too heavily, you won't be able to correct proportion or positional problems as the drawing develops. As you continue to develop the drawing, after you have captured the gesture, these early light lines will fade into the background, but their influence will be seen in the final result.



## GESTURE OF COMPOSITION

Gesture is always important. Just as a figure has a gesture that leads the eye from one body part to the next, a composition has a gesture that connects each element of the picture. This allows the artist to control how the viewer experiences the image. By linking separate parts through the larger gesture lines, the viewer can see the connections between separate parts of the image. This principle can clearly be seen when analyzing masterworks.

In *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* (1618), Peter Paul Rubens is interpreting a story by Theocritus and Ovid of the abduction of the daughters of King Leucippus by twin brothers Castor and Pollux. The composition's gesture shows how intertwined the characters are, literally and figuratively.





### A FEW LINES CONVEY POSE AND EXPRESSION

Study these drawings. Do you see how only a few lines are necessary for the mind to perceive a whole figure? Aim for this simplicity and fluidity in your own work.

